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SUBJECT: THAILAND: NRC HEAD ANAND PANYARACHUN DISCUSSES
THE SOUTH

REF: A. BANGKOK 3203

[1](#)B. BANGKOK 1008

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce. Reason 1.4 (c,d,e)

[1](#)1. (S) SUMMARY: On June 15, the Ambassador met with Anand Panyarachun -- the highly respected former Prime Minister and current head of the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) -- to discuss the ongoing unrest in southern Thailand and Anand's role in RTG's efforts to end the violence. Anand complained Prime Minister Thaksin is still not showing adequate leadership in dealing with the South. He expressed serious concern over rising tensions between the Buddhist and Muslim communities in the South and suggested that the pervasive rumors of U.S. involvement in the violence could have serious implications for both the U.S. and Thai governments. Anand said that problems in the South are rooted in the lack of respect accorded to ethnically Malay Muslims and the absence of the rule of law in the region. In his view, long term solutions to the violence will require Thai bureaucratic reform, improved relations with Muslims countries, and educational reform. END SUMMARY

[1](#)2. (SBU) On June 15 the Ambassador called on former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun to discuss the ongoing unrest in southern Thailand and his role in the RTG's efforts to stop the violence. Anand, perhaps Thailand's most widely respected elder statesman, was called out of retirement in March 2005 by Prime Minister to lead the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) which has been charged with finding solutions to the unrest in the far Southern Muslim majority provinces of Thailand.

THAKSIN: A FAILURE OF LEADERSHIP

[1](#)3. (S) Anand suggested that Prime Minister Thaksin is not prepared to assume the leadership role required to lead a peace process, and worried that the RTG's failure to manage the immediate security situation would impact his own ability to find long-term solutions. He commented that Thaksin was using the media's focus on Anand as an excuse for inaction. Anand further complained that Thaksin's limited understanding of the complex historical factors hindered the Prime Minister's ability to address the problem, dismissively saying, "he doesn't read anything, unless it has to do with pursuing profits."

[1](#)4. (C) Anand said he would meet with Thaksin on June 16 -- only the second time he has met face to face with the Prime Minister since Thaksin asked him to lead the NRC in March. Anand did acknowledge that Thaksin had lived up to his agreement that the NRC would be completely independent -- and had gone out of his way to publicly and privately praise Anand. However, unlike other issues where Thaksin trumpets his "CEO style," the Prime Minister still refuses to be decisive when it comes to the South. Anand said that in order for the reconciliation process to be successful, Thaksin will have to demonstrate that he is clearly in command. "I'm not the second Prime Minister; Thaksin has to manage the day to day requirements."

CONCERN ABOUT RELATIONS BETWEEN BUDDHISTS AND MUSLIMS

[1](#)5. (C) Anand expressed his deep concern over deteriorating relations between the Buddhist and Muslim communities on the ground in the South, noting that extremists are trying to pit Buddhists against Muslims (Ref B) and have created "a climate of fear" that is causing Buddhists to flee the region. Anand said he is particularly worried about deteriorating conditions in Narathiwat province, saying that extremists are threatening both Buddhists and moderate Muslims.

[1](#)6. (C) Anand said the failure of RTG security forces to distinguish between moderate Muslims and the extremist hard core bent on violence was antagonizing the larger Muslim population and encouraging the perception that the conflict is between Buddhists and Muslims. He said the government must be able to explain that this situation in the South is a conflict within the Muslim community between moderates and extremists, and not between the Buddhists and Muslims.

U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN THE SOUTH: THE RUMORS ARE WIDELY BELIEVED

17. (S) Anand spent a significant portion of the meeting discussing the troubling and widely believed rumors in Thailand about the direct involvement of the U.S. Government, and particularly U.S. intelligence, in the South (Ref A). Anand described rumors in the South of the CIA's involvement as "pervasive." He claimed that he had been informed by several sources that U.S. operatives are working with "unsavory" elements of RTG intelligence involved in extra-judicial killings; "I'm concerned the CIA is talking to the wrong people."

18. (S) Anand said stories are circulating in the South that the U.S. orchestrated the April 3, 2005 triple-bombings in Songkhla province -- which included the attack on the Hat Yai International Airport. Anand indicated this issue had serious implications for both the U.S. and Thailand. The Ambassador refuted the claims of U.S. involvement, but agreed that the climate of rumors was potentially harmful to the bilateral relationship. He suggested that Anand receive a briefing on U.S. activities in southern Thailand in order to be able to refute the allegations when confronted with them. (Comment: We will be briefing Anand on June 24. In the interim, he called the Ambassador to clarify that the rumors were more about "FBI involvement" than CIA. In any event, we will endeavor to deal with all of this on Friday. End Comment.)

LACK OF RESPECT/RULE OF LAW, NOT SEPARATISM

19. (C) Anand said there are many overlapping root causes behind the violence and cautioned against overemphasizing the importance of separatism as the central factor. He said that it is instructive to note that 73 percent of southerners participated in the February 2005 general election (voting overwhelmingly against Thaksin's Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party), which proved that most southerners want to work through the Thai system. While most southerners don't want or expect autonomy -- in fact there is no Thai word for autonomy -- many Thai Muslims do feel that they have been marginalized by Thai society and have been neglected by the Thai government for decades, according to Anand.

10. (C) Anand admitted that most Thais had negative -- even racist -- attitudes toward southern Malay Muslims, and this lack of respect towards Malays was a fundamental part of the problem. The second major factor is a lack of rule of law in the South created by the arbitrary actions of RTG security forces. Addressing the basic issues of respect and rule of law are crucial factors will be central to any solution, he said.

FINDING SOLUTIONS: START WITH THE BUREAUCRACY, EDUCATION

11. (C) One of the major impediments to the RTG's efforts to effectively manage the day-to-day security issues of the South is the lack of coordination between different ministries. Anand said that this problem of "stove-piping" extends to the highest levels of the RTG. Anand noted that the primary cabinet ministers focused on the South -- Deputy Prime Minister Jaturon Chaisaeng, Interior Minister Chitchai Wannasathi and Minister of Defense Tammarak Itsarangkun na Ayutthayaat -- are accustomed to receiving their orders directly from the Prime Minister, and operating independently. Anand said that his first recommendation is for Thaksin to create an informal cabinet committee -- to include operational level officials -- in order to better coordinate.

12. (C) Anand, while agreeing that Thaksin has shifted towards a more conciliatory approach to the southern dilemma, lamented that security forces on the ground had not "gotten the message" and were continuing the abusive, corrupt, and violent practices of the past. These daily injustices by security forces and the actions of incompetent civilian officials reinforce the contempt felt by southerners towards the central government. He opined that changing attitudes and actions of Thai security forces and recruiting higher caliber officials for the South will be a huge challenge for the RTG.

13. (C) Anand noted that one of the primary problems facing the South is the education system, agreeing that educational reform should be the primary part of any solution. He said the RTG's adversarial approach to the "pondok" Islamic schools only alienated southerners. Anand said the RTG should draw on the successful efforts in other countries with Islamic schools and that he will recommend that the government work with the pondoks to increase educational opportunities.

WORKING WITH THE NEIGHBORS AND THE OIC

14. (C) Anand opined that Foreign Minister Kantathi

Suphamongkhon has gotten off to a good start on the international aspects of the southern situation and correctly reached out to the Malaysians to repair a crucial relationship damaged by recent Thaksin missteps. Anand noted that the Thai and Malaysian governments still have a large degree of mutual suspicion and lingering resentment from the period when Malaysia was facing its communist insurgency. He cited this mutual suspicion as a key factor behind the lack of better coordination on the border. Anand said that besides Malaysia, Thailand needs to better engage with Singapore and Indonesia about the South.

15. (C) Anand said that Kantathi would expand efforts to reach out to the larger Muslim world; noting the Foreign Minister would travel to Yemen to participate in the Organization of The Islamic Conferences (OIC) Foreign Ministers meeting later this month. Anand said his own recent meetings with an OIC delegation visiting Thailand had been positive, noting the RTG has a "compelling" need to stay in regular contact with the OIC.

COMMENT

16. (S) Comment: Anand has previously shown a deep personal distaste for Thaksin, whom he considers to be arrogant, arriviste and too anxious to control all the levers in Thai society. He clearly is wary of being used as political cover by the Prime Minister and worried that he will not get the actual cooperation from Thaksin that would be necessary to make his work with the NRC more than just an exercise. End Comment.
BOYCE